

# THE YOUNG LORDS

Martha Shelley

During Christmas week, the week that many GLF'ers were participating in the Panther vigil around the Women's House of Detention, the Young Lords were occupying a church in Spanish Harlem. They left peacefully after being served with an injunction - but during their stay 200 children were fed hot breakfasts daily. Over 100 children were given complete physical examinations. The Young Lords held classes, poetry readings, filmshowings, and a New Year's Mass by a radical priest. And the church was open to all the people.

On December 31st and January 31st, your COME OUT reporter, armed with six copies of the last issue, went up to visit the Young Lords. The neighborhood, 111th Street and Lexington Avenue was familiar to me from my days as a caseworker at Harlem Welfare Center - but in those days I had been reluctant to travel there at night. This time I was more afraid of the hordes of police prowling the neighborhood; the TPF, who seemed anxious to be let loose on the Young Lords.

I was searched before being allowed to enter the church. Jon, a GLF'er who had been spending quite a bit of time with the Lords, had explained this to me: "They're trying to keep the place clean of drugs and weapons - so as not to give the police an excuse for a raid - you know, plant a little dope and raid the place and get the Young Lords written up in the papers as running an opium den."

Jon had also explained to me why they had taken over this particular church. There are only three large churches in the neighborhood. The others are small pentecostal storefronts, inadequate for a breakfast program. Of the three large churches, two already had programs going on during the week, and the Lords did not want to interfere with these programs. The First Spanish Methodist Church, however, was closed all during the week, except for a few hours on Sunday. The parishioners, having gotten better jobs, moved up in the social ladder and out of El Barrio, no longer have much to do with the local residents. They do maintain the church there, and come in for services on Sundays.

The Young Lords had written Dr. Humbert Carranza, minister of the church, asking for permission to use the church during the week. They talked with him. When these negotiations proved fruitless, they came to church services and spoke with the congregation. Dr. Carranza then called in the police, and 13 Young Lords, men and women, were beaten and arrested on charges of "inciting to riot." On December 28th, the Young Lords took over the church, and began running their programs. As Jon said, "We are trying to show that radicals are not just people who go around yelling 'fascist pigs'."

When I had passed inspection and was allowed to enter the church, I asked to see Yoruba, Minister of Information. He was in a meeting. The Young Lords invited me to wait and have dinner with them, but I wasn't hungry. I wandered around the church for a while.

The church was hung with the children's drawings, and with revolutionary posters and slogans: "The doors are open to the people's church." "Jesus Christ helped the poor." "All power to the people." "A Vietnam yo no voy, porque yanqui yo no soy." (I will not go to Vietnam because I'm not a Yankee.) One man was attempting to teach Puerto Rican history to a class of unruly eight year olds. In the chapel, I sat down next to a Young Lord named Robles and two women whom I knew from Women's Liberation. They were discussing what to do when the police served their injunction.

After a while, a young woman with long black hair asked me to follow her to the office of the Young Lords Organization, on Madison Avenue between 111th and 112th Street. She told me Yoruba was upstairs napping, that he had been up for 24 hours straight. At the office, another woman in an Afro was acting as receptionist, womaning the phones and talking with whoever came in. I gave her a copy of COME OUT and explained my business. She knew the history of the Stonewall riots, which she related to my escort.

Two men and another woman came into the office and sat down. We all waited around. Then a black man apparently unaffiliated with any group, came in to the office, stamping snow off his boots. He spoke to the receptionist for a while, then caught the sight of the newspaper.

"What's this?" He picked it up. "Homosexual!?" He sneered.

One of the Young Lords spoke up. "Like this is a movement to liberate all kinds of people - black, Puerto Rican, white, heterosexual, homosexual. The man shook his head. "I just came in to talk to one of the Young Lords."

"You were just talking to one," the Young Lord said, nodding towards the receptionist.

"Ain't but two people here who look like they could be Lords."

The Young Lord answered patiently. "There are five Lords here." He pointed to the three women and two men seated, excluding myself and the black fellow.

We waited some more. Someone went out for cigarettes. I was getting hungry. The receptionist gave me some pork lo mein from the back room. A sign over the sink read, "We are not here to oppress each other. Wash your own dishes."

While I was eating, the YLO lawyer came in. We asked him about the injunction. He said that Dr. Carranza had come before the court with badly drawn up papers. The judge was unable to grant an injunction on this basis and he could have thrown the case out - but he postponed the hearing until Friday, giving Dr. Carranza's lawyers time to fix up their papers.

Shortly afterwards, the Young Lords closed their office and we went back to the church. It seemed unlikely that I would be able to see Yoruba that night, so I went home and came back the following day.

After being searched again, I waited for a while, watching people bring milk and medical supplies to the

church. Then I went down into the basement, which was being used as the kitchen and dining hall. Jon was there again. So were some women from Women's Liberation, a representative of the grape workers, and some people from Newsreel who were filming the occupation. I was able to interview Robles, Minister of Defense, at length.

He said that the Young Lords had been in existence for a year, and that they had taken over a similar church in Chicago. He described their programs, and added that anyone could sleep in the church - that windows and junkies were being housed for the night. Remembering my own cursory search, I asked how they managed to keep junk out of the church. He said that the junkies were searched more thoroughly, and that he could tell a junkie from a "straight" person - since he had been a heroin addict for 15 years before he joined the Young Lords. Robles appeared to be in his early thirties.

He had been released from Riker's Island in January of 1969 - had joined the Young Lords subsequently, and has been off drugs ever since. I asked if there were any other guys like him in the organization. He knew of six or seven, all ex-junkies.

He refused to reveal any plans for the defense of the church.

I asked him how the programs operated. He said that food and medical supplies were contributed by local grocers, by the Hunts Point market, by radical doctors and sympathetic people in general. A radical doctor's group, including medical students, was running the clinic.

How did one get to be a Young Lord? Simply by serving the community, by proving oneself through service. Officers were chosen by consensus, if there were any vacancies created - such as by a member being in jail. Programs were determined through meetings within the organization, and meetings with the community. "Whoever is with us is a Young Lord... whoever works with us and serves the people."

After Robles left, I had coffee with one of my sister from Women's Liberation. She had been working in the nursery. A boy of twelve came by, sponging down the tables, talking with the people seated there. I saw Jon again. He was on his way upstairs with a mop and bucket.

After a while I left, thinking about what can be done in a community center, what GLF could do with a church or a loft or brownstone. What it would be like when GLF has its community center, how we could serve our people... what we might learn from the Young Lord's experience...

P.S. The Young Lords offered no resistance when they were ousted from the church however, 106 demonstrators were arrested. Currently the Young Lords are negotiating with the church. Their demands include a free day care program, medical services, a breakfast program, a liberation school, amnesty for all those arrested and an indigenous community board to govern these programs.

## GO TO CHURCH



Photo LNS

# EROTIC POETS of the LIBERATION FRONT UNMINE?



Poems — the right signals put together almost perfectly — come in sounds, colors, words, lush late autumn afternoons in Iowa, at least a million other media, and poets, to avoid wasting time, often call them novels, plays, speeches, movies, articles, folk-rock, hard-rock, or making love.

Erotic poets are children of Eros — the great god Eros who is slung upon his mighty forearms against the blush horizon of an orchard dawn — as opposed to the Eros diminished to a flitty mosquito by Greek and other artists as their governments expanded into empires and wars.

The children of Eros romp and roll on the ripples of his infinite pink thighs, play hide and seek in his sun-gold pubics, sit on his calves with their backs against his shirts passing pipes of cannabis around, and make love on the mauve mattress head of his cock.

Erotic poets know that making love is never dirty or degrading, that only guilt-smearing minds of would-be lovers are, deformed by repressive societies which shrink Eros in order to force his orgasmic energies through files at My-Lai and trumpets at Jericho.

Hence erotic poets know that unclothed body-to-body expressions of love between two men or more are as dirt-free and transcendent as parallel expressions between two women or more, or between a man and woman or multiple combinations thereof, so long as they resonate with the eternal rhythms of the universe, which are sung by Eros.

But brothers and sisters, when erotic poets celebrate the beauty of love between two men or two women instead of bewailing the ugliness, the sickness, into which some such liaisons deteriorate — behold the previously sympathizing cognoscenti of the telecommunications, publishing and political worlds, including the so-called radical sectors of those worlds, politely — and sometimes not so politely — turning their backs, the tears and hostilities of their male chauvinism aroused, unresolved authority syndromes challenged, the will to possession and domination of humans by humans — even, and perhaps especially, in those who profess to be working for the classless society.

Tell them — or better, demonstrate in your poetry — the classless society is an erotic society in which all varieties of humans indulge all varieties of love. Give form to the truth, that most studs would resolve a host of leadership, authority and competition hangups if they could swing into some bisexual action they could feel was beautiful. Show them how repression of homosexual love, except as something dirty and inferior, is a gauge of totalitarianism as valid as censorship, and deeper. Rejections of ubiquitous, unyielding rejection? I'm not sure, I offer these words to the community for consideration, and as a proposal for action if it appears we are, as erotic gay and bisexual poets, victims of psychosexual discrimination.

Now of course you can radiate the theme of love and sexual contacts between members of the same sex (Harry Stack Sullivan called them isophilic love and last fall over the circuits, as long as you keep it dirty and degrading. The clutch of hatred which is *The Boys in the Band* is a fine example. *Midnight Cowboy*, pecking of animals and commodes, movie balconies and battered skulls, is another. Genet's poetic excursions into isophilic sexual degradation and criminality are applauded by the literary; Burroughs' heroin-strung studies of sodomy as social degradation are heralded by such moguls as Mary McCarthy and Mailer.

The devoted radical pedagogue and social critic Paul Goodman (in the "Gay Scenes" issue of *Win*, which, according to an advertisement in *Rat*, "is going to make history of some kind in the radical movement") can even say that "a happy property of sexual acts, and perhaps especially of homosexual acts is that they are dirty, like life. . . ." But Mr. Goodman, aren't we struggling to make possible a much less dirty life for everyone? And aren't what you call sexual acts really acts of unmitigated lust in the sexual life, analogous to profiteering in the economic life and power-mongering in the socio-political life?

Just without the rhythms of Eros is no more love than sound without the rhythms of Eros is music.

Erotic poets must create, in our lives and art, the models of love, including genital love, which transcends gender, possession and domination.

We must dramatize the relationships between male chauvinism's rejections, however subtle, of homosexual love, and repressive male society — especially when the "machismo" manifests itself within the very movement committed to transforming repressive society.

Erotic poets must remind the radical community quite often, apparently — that the soldierboys shooting up the villages in Vietnam are cases-in-point of repressed homosexual needs, among others, and that changing the society which sends them there means eliminating Neanderthal notions of sexual expression.

Erotic poets must shatter the specious relationships fabricated between homosexuality and diseases like Nazi Germany. The Nazis flaunted isophilic sex because they considered it debauched and criminal behavior. Had they understood homosexuality as expression of love, the license they felt to do much they did might have been denied them.

Erotic poets must bring out the erotic poet which is in every human being. Yes, brothers and sisters, an erotic poet is prisoned even in a cop. We have to show him his billy-club's not where it's at, that he's got to search his uniformless body.

"Insurrection of thought always precedes insurrection of arms," Wendell Phillips said.

Now, are erotic poets, qua erotic poets, denied access to the communications circuitry of publishing, theater, and even the radical underground?

You may chortle and say, "Does anyone else *have* access?" But consider the posters for such as "Puppy Dog Tails," and "Oh, Calcutta." Erotic? You know better. I don't happen to suffer from vomit-revision, but if I see her early enough in the morning, that sprawl of big-ass woman in mink stole coming down Second Avenue off the side of a bus can whirl me queasy on a heel.

And the score of "Hair," however musical it may be according to the canons of that egregious pseudo-genre The American Musical Comedy, is not a rock musical, because there is not one erotic throb in all that sound, and music, to be rock, must be erotic; Elvis Presley as opposed to Snooky Lanson; Joe Cocker as opposed to Tom Jones.

And the proliferation of publications exploiting gay-sex which, however nudely genital, is distinctly deroticized, has been amply covered elsewhere in *Comic Out*.

Genuine erotic expressions of our rich, passionate, poignantly evolving gay life-styles — truly, brother and sisters, I've begun to doubt they can be got through the sex oppression apparatus of established communications.

If there is agreement in the community with views expressed here, let's consider coalescing some.

Naturally, being erotic poets, we know where leadership's at — in shelves upon shelves of Leadership Manuals the Pentagon puts out for its militarists. And we know the classless society, being erotic, has no leaders.

We've cut loose from opportunist delusions, too.

So, An Erotic Poets' Workshop, affiliated with the rest of the Gay Liberation Front? We could call it *Garra Local Number Sixty-Nine*.

We could communicate with the brothers throughout this land where erotic poets are oppressed. For instance, I suspect discrimination at some of the well-known writers' workshops on the university circuit — that they don't even read the application unless the applicant has signified ownership of wife and offspring. Well, that's their loss.

If we found a way to finance them, we could put out collections of our poetry, try to distribute them so they constitute a confrontation, beckon to the erotic poet in every man.

And if we concluded the publishers really do discriminate against us, we could picket the shit out of them. And other things.

Do we need to organize? If you think so, please feel free to communicate through me, Miami the poet.

Un abrazo. Que viva la gué liberacion!

You shall never lonely more,  
for undiscovered, common be.  
For your consent to ship with me  
has borne us to a newborn shore,  
for only you and I before,  
could've made this land of we,  
forever joined, forever free,  
her music fields and trees explored.

In each of us the other sought  
his perfect body, soyl and mind  
in images of Eros wrought:  
my love for your my self shall find.

Be grateful, then, my newfound lover,  
to join those few who've found each other.

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Soft he comes,  
on Persian rugs of floating;  
swift he comes,  
dissolving war before him.  
Then hard he comes,  
then slow, and feelingly,  
and hesitantly goes  
still, taking danger with him.

Now the poet sons  
can reveal the frigid lechers,  
later can forgive them  
their Neanderthal repressions,  
for being under all of them,  
ever warrior one, a poet.

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## STONE POEM

*Jessica said:* A person who is involved in growth has to be involved in change and therefore in revolution. That's really idealistic for me. I wake up each morning in a state of inertia. You know, this is disgusting. I get stoned on two pokes.

*Jessica said:* This expression I must remember — Jesus I forgot what I was going to say — oh yes-verybody.

*I said:* You know the sound a baby makes when it's born. AAAAAAAHHH! That's the sound of life. Of energy. And you spend every next moment of your life being told to shut up. Or if you're lucky to put a frame around it and be an artist. I just want to scream.

— Jessica Falstein & Kathy Braun